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PROVISIONAL APPLICATION COVER SHEET

This is a request for filing a PROVISIONAL APPLICATION under 37 CFR § 1.53 (b)(2).

Docket Number		1170/3		Type a plus sign (+) inside this box ->	+
INVENTOR(s)/APPLICANT(s)					
LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	MIDDLE INITIAL	RESIDENCE (CITY AND EITHER STATE OR FOREIGN COUNTRY)		
SHIMON	Michael		Shikmim, Israel		
LAOR	Igal		Caesaria, Israel		
LAOR	Michal		Caesaria, Israel		
HAHMON	Ilan		Caesaria, Israel		
	Eldad		Hadera, Israel		
TITLE OF THE INVENTION (280 characters max)					
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR BONUS POINTS UTILIZATION					
CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS					
Mark M. Friedman, c/o Anthony Castorina, 2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 207, Arlington					
STATE	Virginia	ZIP CODE	22202	COUNTRY	U.S.A.
ENCLOSED APPLICATION PARTS (check all that apply)					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Specification	Number of Pages	47	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small Entity Statement
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Drawing(s)	Number of Sheets	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify)
METHOD OF PAYMENT (check one)					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A check or money order is enclosed to cover the Provisional filing fees			PROVISIONAL FILING FEE AMOUNT(\$)	\$150.00
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge filing fees and credit Deposit Account Number:			06-2140	

The invention was made by an agency of the United States Government or under a contract with an agency of the United States Government.

☒ No

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Respectfully submitted,

SIGNATURE

TYPED or PRINTED NAME Mark M. Friedman

Date

25 OCT 96

REGISTRATION NO. 33,883

☐ Additional inventors are being named on separately numbered sheets attached hereto

PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FILING ONLY

APPLICATION FOR PATENT

5

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Eldad Hahmon and Michael Inbar

10

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR BONUS POINTS
UTILIZATION

15

20 FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a novel system and method for the utilization of bonus points which enable a consumer of goods to enjoy a superior versatility of benefits as is compared to traditional coupons.

A traditional coupon is a detachable portion of a certificate, ticket,
25 label, advertisement, or the like, entitling the holder to something, as a gift or discount, or for use as an order blank, a contest entry form, etc. However, traditional coupons are typically limited in the versatility of benefits they entitle a holder.

In the credit cards era, and in order to encourage the use of credit,
30 the concept of coupons has broadened. Thus, credit companies provide

credit card users with bonus points according to the amount and/or type of credit consumed thereby, whereas the users are free to trade some or all of the bonus points at their discretion into gifts, aerial mileage, discounts for certain goods, etc., according to a list of a plurality of offered benefits, each of which has a dedicated bonus points value associated therewith. Thus, a credit card user can choose a benefit or benefits of his choice for his bonus points. It will be appreciated that the versatility and therefore attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system is far superior over that of traditional coupons.

10 While the credit companies bonus points system encourages users to consume credit, no equivalent system which enjoys such versatility and attractiveness exists for encouraging consumers to consume goods other than credit. In addition while credit card bonus points system rely on credit purchases only, no system exists, except for the traditional discounts and coupons, which rewards consumers regardless of the payment method used for a product purchase.

In addition, although the use of credit cards simplifies the process of bonus point accumulation by a consumer, it typically does not do so for the product manufacturer. For example, to conduct promotional sales

a product manufacturer needs to manufacture and distribute dedicated products. Thus, a soft drink manufacturer typically needs to manufacture

dedicated bottles, bottle labels or bottle caps which can be used by the

consumer as entry means into raffles and the like. Due to their dedicated

5 nature, such promotion items are typically a hassle to produce. In

addition, since unsold promotional products cannot be resold to stores

following the end of a promotional sale, such products generate losses to

the manufacturer. Finally, these promotional items are oftentimes the

target of in-store vandalism by consumers wishing to retrieve the

10 dedicated promotional aspect of the product without having to purchase

the product itself.

There is thus a widely recognized need for, and it would be highly

advantageous to have, a bonus points system which enjoys the versatility

and attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system, and yet is

15 applicable to encourage consumption of goods other than credit and is

advantageous for both the product consumer and the product

manufacturer.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a plurality of consumers, the bonus points being associated with a plurality of goods, each of the plurality of goods being coded by a code, the system comprising (a) a plurality of user clients being at a respective disposal of the plurality of consumers, each of the plurality of user clients including a code identifier operatively communicating therewith, the code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of goods; and (b) at least one communication server being in communication with each of the plurality of user clients upon establishing communication therewith, the at least one communication server being configured so as to cumulatively grant any one consumer of the plurality of consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of the plurality of goods.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention described below, the at least one communication server being further configured so as to allow any one consumer of the plurality of consumers to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional

benefits, each of the plurality of optional benefits is trade for a predetermined value of bonus points.

According to still further features in the described preferred

embodiments the code identifier is an optical scanner, whereas the code
5 is an optical code.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the optical scanner is a barcode reader, whereas the optical
code is a barcode.

According to still further features in the described preferred
10 embodiments the code identifier is a magnetic code reader, whereas the
code is a magnetic code.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the code identifier is a radiofrequency reader, whereas the
code is a radiofrequency code.

15 According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the code identifier includes a base communicating with a
user client of the plurality of user clients and a remote identifier
communicating with the base by remote communication.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the base is a stationary base.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the base communicates with the user client of the plurality
5 of user clients by cord communication.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the base communicates with a user client of the plurality of
user clients only if the user client is a table top computer.

According to still further features in the described preferred
10 embodiments the base requires a constant voltage for operation.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the constant voltage is about 110 Volts or about 220 Volts.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the base or the remote identifier limits communication
15 directly or indirectly only to the communication server.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the communication server communicates with the user
client only if the user client communicates with the base.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the base is operative only if so instructed by the
communication server.

According to still further features in the described preferred
5 embodiments a specific base is operative only with a specific user client.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments a specific base entitles a specific consumer to a base
related bonus.

According to still further features in the described preferred
10 embodiments the remote identifier is a remote optical scanner.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the remote optical scanner neutralizes or changes the code
following scanning.

According to still further features in the described preferred
15 embodiments the remote identifier and the base form an obligatory
operative pair.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the remote identifier includes a mechanism for identifying
a surrounding characteristic.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the code or a part of the code is invisible to a naked eye.

~~According to still further features in the described preferred~~

embodiments the communication between the code identifier and one of
5 the plurality of user clients is effected by a communication mode selected
from the group consisting of cord and cordless communication modes.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the cordless communication mode is selected from the
group consisting of infrared communication, microwave communication,
10 sound communication radio communication and optical communication.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the code identifier operatively communicating with any
one of the plurality of user clients is identifiable by a digital code.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is
15 provided a method for granting bonus points to a consumer, the method
comprising the steps of (a) associating each of a plurality of goods with a
code; (b) ~~operatively communicating between a user client of the~~
consumer and a code identifier, the code identifier being capable of
identifying the code of each of the plurality of goods; (c) establishing

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communication between the user client and at least one communication server being configured so as to cumulatively grant the consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of the plurality of goods; (d) using the code identifier, identifying the code of at least one of a plurality of goods purchased by the consumer and forwarding the code via the user client to the communication server; and (e) cumulatively granting the consumer a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of the at least one of the plurality of goods purchased by the consumer.

10 According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising (a) at least one communication server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product; (b) at least one checkout register system being for providing the information pertaining to the product
15 upon receiving a code associated with the product; and (c) a plurality of user clients each being capable of independently communicating with the at least one communication server and the at least one checkout register system, each of the plurality of user clients being operable by a user and

being for relaying the information pertaining to the product to the at least one communication server so as to grant the user with the predetermined value of bonus points.

According to still another aspect of the present invention there is

5 provided a method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of (a) providing a communication server capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to information associated with a product of a plurality of products; (b) providing a checkout register system capable of providing the information pertaining

10 to the product upon receiving a code associated with the product; (c) communicating the information pertaining to the product from the checkout register system to a user client; and (d) communicating the information pertaining to the product from the user client to the communication server, such that the consumer is granted with the

15 predetermined value of bonus points.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention described below, the system further comprising a plurality of portable information storage devices each being at the disposal of a specific user, each of the plurality of portable information storage

devices being capable of receiving and storing information associated with the product from the at least one checkout register system and further being capable of communicating the information stored therein to each of the plurality of user clients.

5 According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the portable information storage devices also stores information pertaining to bonus points of a user thereof.

 According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments each of the plurality of portable information storage
10 devices is a magnetic card.

 According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments each of the plurality of portable information storage
devices is a smart card.

 According to still further features in the described preferred
15 embodiments each of the plurality of portable information storage
devices is a memory device selected from the group consisting of a
~~magnetic memory device, an optical memory device and an optical-~~
magnetic memory device.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the magnetic memory device is selected from the group
consisting of a disk and a ram chip.

According to still further features in the described preferred
5 embodiments each of the plurality of user clients is a personal computer.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to
the product from the checkout register system to the user client is
effected by a portable information device being operable by the
10 consumer.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to
the product from the user client to the communication server is effected
via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup
15 communication and a local area network communication.

According to an additional aspect of the present invention there is
~~provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, the system~~
comprising (a) at least one communication server being configured so as
to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying

information pertaining to a product; and (b) at least one checkout register system being for generating the information pertaining to the product

upon receiving a code associated with the product and further being for

communicating the information pertaining to the product to the at least

5 one communication server, such that the user is granted with the predetermined value of bonus points upon purchasing the product.

According to yet an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the

method comprising the steps of (a) providing a communication server

10 capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to

information associated with a product of a plurality of products; (b)

providing a checkout register system capable of providing the

information pertaining to the product upon receiving a code associated

with the product; and (c) communicating the information pertaining to

15 the product from the checkout register system to the communication

server, such that the consumer purchasing the product is granted with the

predetermined value of bonus points. According to further features in

preferred embodiments of the invention described below, the information

pertaining to the product includes information selected from the group

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consisting of product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the product is associated with a promotional sale and
5 further wherein the information pertaining to the product also includes information identifying the product as a promotional item.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the user is entitled to benefits associated with the promotional sale upon relaying the information pertaining to the product
10 to the at least one communication server.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to the product to the at least communication server is effected via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup
15 communication and a local area network communication.

According to still an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system comprising (a) at least one communication server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the

product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an

~~integer greater than one; and (b) at least one checkout register system~~

being for communicating a purchase of the product N to the at least one

5 communication server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon the purchasing.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the

method comprising the steps of (a) providing at least one communication

10 server, the communication server being configured so as to track and

enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further

being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing

a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) providing

at least one checkout register system, the checkout register system being

15 for communicating a purchase of the product N to the at least one

communication server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the

~~benefit upon the purchasing.~~

According to yet a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the

system comprising (a) at least one communication server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product

was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to

a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater

5 than one; and (b) at least one user client being for communicating a purchase of the product to the at least one communication server, such

that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon communicating

the purchase of the product to the at least one communication server.

According to still a further aspect of the present invention there is

10 provided a method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the method comprising the steps of (a) providing at least one communication

server, the communication server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further

being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing

15 a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) providing at least one user client, the at least one user client being for

communicating a purchase of the product to the at least one

communication server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the

benefit upon communicating the purchase of the product to the at least one communication server.

The present invention successfully addresses the shortcomings of the presently known configurations by providing a bonus points system and method which enjoys the versatility and attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system, and yet is applicable to encourage consumption of goods other than credit. The system of the present invention can be advantageously used for sales promotion.

10

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is herein described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a schematic depiction of a system according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic depiction of a code identifier employed with the system according to the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a schematic depiction of a system according to another aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a schematic depiction of a system according to still another aspect of the present invention; and

FIG. 5 is a schematic depiction of a system according to yet another aspect of the present invention.

5

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is of a novel system and method which can be used to grant consumers benefit convertible bonus points when purchasing goods. The system and method of the present invention enable a consumer of goods to enjoy a superior versatility of benefits as is compared to traditional coupons.

The principles and operation of the system and method according to the present invention may be better understood with reference to the drawings and accompanying descriptions.

Before explaining at least one embodiment of the invention in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the

drawings. The invention is capable of other embodiments or of being practiced or carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

5 Referring now to the drawings, Figure 1 illustrates the system according to the present invention which is referred to hereinbelow as system 10. System 10 serves for granting bonus points to a plurality of consumers. The bonus points are associated with a plurality of goods 12 (one is shown), each of goods 12 is coded by a code 14.

10 As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the phrase "bonus points" refers to a virtual gift which is convertible upon demand to an actual benefit.

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the terms "goods" and "products" are used interchangeably and
15 include, but are not limited to, purchasable products or services, receipts receivable for such products or services, etc.

System 10 according to the present invention includes a plurality of user clients 16 (one is shown).

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the phrase "user client" includes, but is not limited to, personal

computers (PC) having an operating system such as DOS, Windows™,

OS/2™ or Linux; Macintosh™ computers; computers having JAVA™-OS

5 as the operating system; and graphical workstations such as the

computers of Sun Microsystems™ and Silicon Graphics™, and other

computers having some version of the UNIX operating system such as

AIX™ or SOLARIS™ of Sun Microsystems™; a PalmPilot™, a

PilotPC™, Nokia Communicator™ or any other handheld device; or any

10 other known and available operating system. The term further includes

mobile cellular telephone devices and mobile cellular communicator

devices having, in addition to telephone properties, capabilities similar to

those of a personal computer (PC) or a personal digital assistant (PDA).

Hereinafter, the term "Windows™" includes but is not limited to

15 Windows95™, Windows 3.x™ in which "x" is an integer such as "1",

Windows NT™, Windows98™, Windows CE™ and any upgraded

~~versions of these operating systems by Microsoft Inc. (Seattle,~~

Washington, USA).

Each of user clients 16 according to the present invention is at a respective disposal of one of a plurality of consumers. Each user client

16 is operatively communicating with a code identifier 18. As further detailed hereinunder, code identifier 18 is selected capable of identifying
 5 code 14 of each of the plurality of goods 12. For certain embodiments user client 16 and code identifier 18 can be integrated into a single operative device.

The communication between a specific code identifier 18 and a specific user clients 16 can be effected by any applicable communication
 10 mode, such as cord and cordless communication modes. The cordless communication mode selected can be, for example, infrared communication, microwave communication, sound communication radio communication or optical communication. As will be appreciated by one ordinarily skilled in the art, each of the above communication modes is
 15 well suited for transmission of the required data.

System 10 according to the present invention further includes at least one communication server 20 (one is shown). Server 20 is in communication with each of one of the plurality of user clients 16 upon establishing communication therewith. It will be appreciated that

communication can be established through a dialup connection, a local area network or any other communication mode suitable for

interconnecting client 16 and server 20. Server(s) 20 are configured so

as to cumulatively grant any one consumer of the plurality of consumers

5 a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of a code 14 of

any one of the plurality of goods 12. It will be appreciated in this case

that when such goods are purchased goods, purchase can be effected by

any means, including, but not limited to, cash, check or a credit card.

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that

10 follows the term "consumer" includes one or more individuals having

legitimate access to a specific user client 16, a specific username for

communicating between any user client 16 and server(s) 20, a specific

code identifier 18 having an identifier code which at different times can

be connected to different user clients 16, or a specific user code

15 communicable to server(s) 20 via user client 16. Thus, for the purpose of

the present invention members of a family unit can in some applications

be considered a single consumer.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention

server(s) 20 are further configured so as to allow any one consumer to

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select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, each of which is trade for a predetermined value of bonus points. The benefits

can be, for example, any of the benefits offered by credit companies as a

trade for their bonus points, such as, but not limited to, free products or

5 services, discount products or services, aerial mileage, etc. Server 20

manages a saving protocol which ensures to credit any specific consumer

with bonuses entitled thereto and to keep the appropriate book-keeping of

earned vs. spent bonuses. In addition, server 20 can manage the bonuses

of a user so as allow the accumulation of interest on accumulated bonus

10 points.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention

code identifier 18 is an optical scanner, whereas in this case code 14 is an

optical code. The optical scanner can be selected from any class of

optical scanners, such as, but not limited to, laser optical scanners, LED

15 optical scanners and CCD optical scanners. Further details relating to

types of optical scanners are found in, for example, U.S. Pat. No.

~~5,640,002, which is incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein.~~

According to a preferred embodiment the optical scanner is a barcode

reader, whereas the optical code is a barcode. The barcode can be, for

example, a linear barcode, a circular barcode, or a two dimensional barcode, as for example described in the home page of Intelligent

Barcode Systems, Inc./Sunmax Corp. (see, <http://www.barcodesystems.com>).

5 According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention code identifier 18 is a magnetic code reader, whereas code 14 is a magnetic code. According to yet another preferred embodiment of the present invention code identifier 18 is a radiofrequency reader, whereas code 14 is a radiofrequency code. Such readers and codes are

10 well known in the art and therefore require no further description herein.

 In any case, code 14 is printed on, adhered onto and/or detachable from goods 12 and it can be identified by identifier 18. Alternatively, code 14 is printed on or adhered onto a code carrier which is packed with or within goods 12.

15 The operation of system 10 according to a presently preferred embodiment of the present invention is as follows.

 A consumer purchases goods which are coded by barcodes. Each of the goods is preferably coded by a unique barcode which entitles the consumer to a certain value of bonus points. It should be noted that,

according to this embodiment of the present invention, even identical products each having a unique and distinguishing barcode. At his

convenience, using a personalized (coded) barcode reader and his home

PC the user (i) scans the barcodes of the purchased goods; and (ii)

5 forwards the scanned information via the Internet or electronic mail (email) to a dedicated Internet site. The Internet site is simultaneously and automatically forwarded with the code of the personalized barcode reader.

It will be appreciated that software capable of translating a
10 barcode, or any other code, into alphanumeric characters code or a binary code are well known in the art and are readily available from a plurality of suppliers.

At this stage the following events take place.

First, each barcode is associated with a predetermined value of
15 bonus points according to an existing lookup table.

Second, the bonus points are cumulatively added to a bonus points account associated with the personalized barcode reader (i.e., with the consumer).

It will be appreciated that software for executing the above steps are either readily available or are readily programmable by those of skills in the art.

Third, the specific barcodes are either marked as used or are
5 deleted from the lookup table, such that re-scanning a scanned barcode will not result in additional bonus points added to any account.

The Internet site also offers benefits, each is tradable for a known value of credit points. Thus, the user can order a benefit or benefits by trading some or all of his bonus points for the benefit or benefits of his
10 choice.

The Internet site preferably includes sections which are accessible by the public and serve for advertising the system, its benefits, etc., and other sections which are accessible only by subscribers of the system, each of which has access to data pertaining to the users bonus points and
15 the like.

Hence, the present invention also provides a method for granting bonus points to a consumer. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by implementing the following method

steps, in which, in a first step, each of a plurality of goods is associated with a unique code.

In a second step of the method, operative communication is set between a user client of the consumer and a code identifier. The code
5 identifier is capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of goods.

In a third step of the method according to the present invention a dial-up, or any other form of connection is established between the user client and at least one communication server which is configured so as to
10 cumulatively grant the consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of the plurality of goods, and is preferably also configured so as to allow the consumers to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, each of the plurality of optional benefits is trade for a predetermined value of bonus
15 points.

In a fourth step of the method, the code identifier is used for identifying the code of at least one of a plurality of goods purchased by the consumer and the code is forwarded via the user client to the communication server.

Finally, the consumer is cumulatively granted a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of the at least one of the plurality of goods purchased by the consumer.

Figure 2 illustrates some preferred configurations for code identifier 18 according to the present invention, which configurations are designed to prevent fraudulent use of system 10. Thus, code identifier 18 includes a base 24 communicating with a user client 16 and a remote identifier 26 communicating with base 24 by, as indicated at 25, remote communication, such as radio, infrared, or sound communication. The remote communication mode is designed so as to limit the operative distance between base 24 and remote identifier 26 to a distance characterizing home cordless telephone systems, e.g., not more than about 50 meters. To this end, base 24 and remote identifier 26 are equipped with compatible receivers and transmitters, so as to effect remote communication as well known in the art. Base 24 preferably communicates with a modem of user client 16. It will be appreciated that base 24 and user client 16 may be functionally integrated into a single operating unit. Base 24 is preferably selected bulky and heavy enough so as to be stationary so as to limit its use to a defined location. In addition,

and for the same reason, base 24 is constructed so as to communicate with user client 16 by cord 28 communication. Furthermore, base 24 is

~~preferably designed so as to communicate with a user client 16 only if~~

the user client 16 is a table top (stationary) computer. No

5 communication is establishable if user client 16 is a laptop or palmtop computer, so as to further limit the use of identifier 18 to specific

locations. Preferably, base 24 requires a constant voltage for operation.

Most preferably the constant voltage is about 110 Volts or about 220

Volts. In other words, base 24 is operable when connected to a high

10 voltage source so as to still further limit the use of identifier 18 to specific locations. Base 24 or remote identifier 26 according to preferred

embodiments of the present invention are designed so as to limit the communication of user client 16 when employing identifier 18 only to

communication server 20. Furthermore, communication server 20 is so

15 designed and constructed so as to communicate with a user client 16 only

if user client 16 itself communicates with base 24. Furthermore,

~~according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, base 24 is~~

operative only if so instructed by communication server 20. Thus,

obligatory relationship coexists between identifier 18 and server 20, so as

to limit fraudulent use of system 10. According to yet another preferred embodiment of the present invention a specific base 24 is operative only

with a specific user client 16. Such specificity can be irreversibly

punched into base 24 upon installation. According to another preferred

5 embodiment, a specific base 24 entitles a specific consumer to base related bonuses. Thus, in a way similar to credit cards, silver, gold or

platinum bases can be provided to different consumers according to the

volume of their use of system 10, or in other words, according to the

volume of their consumption, which bases entitle their owners to base

10 related bonus. It will be appreciated that defining a base 24 as silver, gold or platinum, etc., can be effected at the hardware and/or software

level. If effected solely at the software level, such definition can be made automatically. In other words, upgrade or low-grade of a specific

base 24 can be automatically enacted by a dedicated software in server

15 20. Still preferably, remote identifier 26 and base 24 form an obligatory operative pair.

Remote identifier 26 is preferably a remote optical scanner. As

explained hereinabove, specific scanned barcodes are either marked as

used or are deleted from the lookup table, such that re-scanning a

scanned barcode will not result in additional bonus points added to any account. However, an alternative approach may be exercised according

~~to which the need for unique code for each specific product is obviated.~~

Thus, according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention the

5 remote optical scanner neutralizes or changes the code following scanning. Such neutralization or change can be effected by physically damaging the code in a way which is identifiable by the scanner. Such damage can be enacted by a scraping mechanism which scrapes the code

or a portion thereof or alternatively by the application of a dye onto the
10 code, e.g., via a dye dispenser activated upon scanning, which dye is identifiable by the scanner. In either case, a re-scan of the same code is rendered inoperative. It will be appreciated that preventative measures against the fraudulent use of the scanning device can also include protection against the use of forged (e.g. photocopied) bar codes. In the
15 alternative, the software used in identifier 26 and/or base 24 and/or user client 16 and/or communication server 20 memorizes read codes and
~~prevent the re-utilization of pre-scanned codes.~~

Remote identifier 26 preferably includes a mechanism for identifying a surrounding characteristic. Such a mechanism can identify,

for example, lighting which is unique to shops (e.g., fluorescent lighting), sound unique to shops, or a dedicated signal deliberately produced in a shop and which is designed to render remote identifier 26 inoperative within a shop. Such a signal can be of the type employed for remote communication between base 24 and identifier 26 and which will block such communication in the shop's vicinity. The code itself or a part thereof can be an invisible code, i.e., invisible to a naked eye.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention the software which serve for translating a barcode, or any other code, into alphanumeric characters code or a binary code is operable only if both base 24 and identifier 26 are operatively communicating therewith.

As shown in Figure 3, according to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, which system is referred to herein as system 50.

System 50 includes at least one communication server 52. Server 52 serves for granting a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product.

System 50 further includes at least one checkout register system 54. Register system 54 serves for providing information pertaining to a

product upon receiving a code associated with the product. It will be appreciated that as used herein checkout register system 54 can also include a computer terminal or a central computer system either of which are in direct communication with checkout register(s). For example, a supermarket or a department store typically has a central computer system which may be connected to each of the registers operating at that store.

System 50 further includes a plurality of user clients 56, one of which is shown in Figure 3. Client 56 is capable of independently communicating with communication server 52 and with checkout register system 54. Preferably client 56 is a personal computer, more preferably client 56 is a desktop computer system.

Thus, communication between client 56 and communication server 52 or checkout register system 54 can be effected either through a dialup connection or through a local area network.

As further detailed hereinbelow communication between client 56 and checkout register system 54 can alternatively be effected through a portable information storage device.

Client 56 is operable by a user and serves for relaying information pertaining to the product to communication server 52. Such information

In this aspect system 50 is similar to system 10 described
5 hereinabove.

According to a preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the information pertaining to the product includes information such as, but not limited to, product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase. This information is generated in register
10 system 54 upon receipt of a code associated with the product. Typically this code is a barcode associated with the product.

According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention the information pertaining to product also includes information identifying the product as a promotional item. In this case, when a user
15 of system 50 purchases such a product and relays the information pertaining thereto to communication server 52, the user is also declared eligible to a benefit associated with the specific purchase of this product.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention system 50 further includes a plurality of portable

information storage devices 58, one of which is shown in Figure 3.

Device 58 is at the disposal of a specific user and serves for receiving

~~and storing information associated with the product from register system~~

54. Device 58 further serves for communicating the information stored

5 therein to user client 56. To enable device 58 to communicate with client

56, system 50 further includes an interface 60 which is in communication

with client 56. This communication is similar to that described

hereinabove for identifier 18 and user client 16 and as such can be

effected by any applicable communication mode, such as cord and

10 cordless communication modes. The cordless communication mode

selected can be, for example, infrared communication, microwave

communication, sound communication radio communication or optical

communication. As will be appreciated by one ordinarily skilled in the

art, each of the above communication modes is well suited for

15 transmission of the required data. Interface 60 is configured to accept

device 58 in a manner which enables the relaying of information

~~pertaining to the product from device 58 to client 56.~~

Similarly, device 58 can communicate with register system 54.

To this end, register system 54 also includes an interface 62 which is

similar in construction and function to interface 60. It will be appreciated that since register system 54 can also include a computer

terminal or a central computer system, either of which are in direct communication to the actual checkout register, communication with
5 register system 54 can also imply communication with the central computer system which is in direct communication with a register.

According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention device 58 can also serve for storing bonus points granted by communication server 52. Thus according to this embodiment of the
10 present invention device 58 can also be used for the utilization of bonus points stored therein as means of payment at a point of purchase. Such a payment can be provided to register system 54 by utilizing interface 62 described hereinabove to upload information pertaining to the bonus points stored in device 58 to register system 54.

15 It will be appreciated that since device 58 can communicate with register system 54 and client 56, device 58 can also store information pertaining to a user thereof and thus become personalized or coded. Such information can be used to identify the user to both register system 54 and to client 56.

It will further be appreciated that since device 58 of this aspect of the present invention stores information of value which includes

~~purchases made and bonus points received by a specific user, device 58~~

is preferably configured such that access to the information stored therein

5 is restricted to the user by, for example, a personal identification number (PIN) and the like. In addition the personal identification number can also be used to grant a user communication access to both register system 54 and to client 56.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the

10 present invention device 58 is a magnetic card. In this case, information received and stored by device 58 is preferably stored on a magnetic strip provided therein. Interfaces 60 and 62 are, in this case, magnetic card interfaces capable of downloading information from, and uploading information to, device 58. Many examples of magnetic card interfaces
15 and magnetic card types are known in the art and as such no further detail is provided herein.

~~According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the~~

present invention device 58 is a smart card.

Smart cards, also known as electronic cards are cards capable of storing and controlling more data than the ubiquitous magnetic strip

cards, while remaining simpler in design than personal computer cards,

known as PC Cards. Smart cards utilize integrated circuits, memories and

5 even microprocessors embedded within a card the dimensions of which are typically similar to that of a standard credit card. Thus smart cards

offer a versatile combination of relatively low cost with a high degree of ruggedness for a myriad of data transfer transactions. Smart card readers

have been designed to accept a smart card and couple the smart card with

10 for example a personal computer. For example, the use of a standard receptacle in the computer, such as a PCMCIA slot provided for PC

Cards, enables a smart card to communicate with a personal computer

without the need for additional hardware. Examples of various types of

smart cards and smart card readers, can be found in U.S. Pat. No.

15 5,955,722 to Kurt et al. and U.S. Pat. No. 5,955,021 to Tiffany III which are incorporated herein by reference.

Thus, it will be appreciated that in the case where device 58 is a smart card and client 56 is a personal computer configured with a PCMCIA slot, that such a slot can serve as interface 60. Since the

computer(s) of a checkout register system are typically not provided with a PCMCIA slot, interface 62 communicating thereto can function similarly to a PCMCIA slot in this case and thus can provide a suitable interface for device 58.

5 It will be appreciated that alternatively device 58 can be of any portable device capable of downloading and uploading and storing information. As such, device 58 can be for example, any magnetic, optical or optical magnetic memory device. Examples to a magnetic storage device which can be utilized in device 58 of the present invention
10 is a RAM chip.

According to another aspect of the present invention and as shown in Figure 4, there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, which system is referred to herein as system 70. System 70 includes at least one communication server 72 which serves for granting
15 a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product. System 70 further includes at least one checkout register system 74 which serves for generating information pertaining to a product upon receiving a code associated with the product and further being capable of communicating information pertaining to the product to

at least one communication server, such that the user is granted with a predetermined value of bonus points upon purchasing of product.

System 70 is identical to system 50 described hereinabove with the exception that communication between the checkout register system and the communication server is effected via a dialup connection or a hard line connection and as such a user client is not necessary in this configuration.

Thus, according to this aspect of the present invention upon a purchase of a product, information pertaining to the product and information pertaining to the user purchasing the product, which can include a user identification code, are communicated from register system 74 to communication server 72, such that the user is granted with bonus points according to the product purchased. Such bonus points can then be utilized by the user as further described hereinabove for system 10.

Since the systems described hereinabove each grant bonus points to users thereof according to specific products purchased by the users, these systems can accumulate statistical information related to products and users. For example, these systems can accumulate information

related to the purchase habits of a user. Such statistical information can be used to construct a profile of a user or of user groups. It will be

~~appreciated that in order to collect statistical information for a single~~

user over a given number of purchase events, identification of the user

5 via, for example, device 58 of system 50 and/or personal identification as

described hereinabove is necessary. This statistical data enables these

systems to provide a user with information including advertisements as to

products likely to be consumed by the user. This information can be

provided directly to user interfaces 16 or 56, upon establishment of

10 communication with their respective communication servers, or by any

commonly used communication methods such as electronic mail,

facsimile, telephony and posted mail.

In addition, statistical information can be retrieved and processed

for a plurality of users to thereby produce a purchase profile for any

15 particular product, such as, for example, the number of times a specific

product is purchased over a time period or at a particular time of the year.

~~It will be appreciated in this case, that such statistical data can be~~

valuable to a product manufacturer and/or a point of sale since this

statistical data also includes information on a variety of products

consumed by a specific identifiable user. In this case, personal profile information of each specific user is stored in the communication server such that the purchase habits of the user can be correlated to a personal profile thereof.

5 According to another aspect of the present invention and as shown in Figure 5, there is provided a system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system referred to hereinunder as system 100. System 100 includes at least one communication server 102 which is configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was
 10 purchased. As such, server 102 includes a numerating device 104 which tracks the number of times a product was purchased over a predetermined time period. Server 102 also serves for declaring a purchaser eligible to a benefit upon the purchase of a product N (N is an integer greater than one, e.g., the 10th product, the 100th product, the
 15 1,000th product the 10,000th product, the 100,000th product or the 1,000,000th product). It will be appreciated that server 102 can also enable stores, manufacturers or any other organizations to stage lotteries using system 100. According to one embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, system 100 further includes at least one checkout

register system 106. Register system 106 serves for communicating each specific purchase of the product to communication server 102. Typically

register system 106 communicates either a barcode information of the product or other information identifying the product. Upon identifying the product, server 102 enumerates the product and compares it to a stored purchase number N for the product, which purchase number entitles the purchasing user to a benefit according to the promotional sale of the product. It will be appreciated that although independent register systems are capable of carrying out such a promotional sale at each point of sale independently, no system exists with which a promotional sale can be co-conducted in a large number of stores on a nationwide basis.

According to another embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, system 100 alternatively or additionally includes the user clients described hereinabove for system 10 or 50. In this case, purchase information can be communicated to communication server 102 as described hereinabove for systems 10, or 50. It will be appreciated that in this case since the purchaser relays information pertaining to a purchase the product is enumerated either according to time of purchase

at the point of sale or according to the time the information was communicated to communication server 102.

It will be appreciated in this case, that since information pertaining to a promotional sale product is stored within communication server 102 of system 100, such products need not be different physically than identical non-promotional products. This traverses the hassles and added expenses associated with the dedicated manufacturing of promotional sales items.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention systems 10, 50, 70 and 100 are integrated into a single system which provides all or some of the services described herein for these systems.

Thus, the present invention provides bonus points and promotional sales systems and methods which enjoys the versatility and attractiveness of the credit card system, and yet are applicable to encourage consumption of goods other than credit.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for granting bonus points to a plurality of consumers, the bonus points being associated with a plurality of goods, each of said plurality of goods being coded by a code, the system comprising:

- (a) a plurality of user clients being at a respective disposal of the plurality of consumers, each of said plurality of user clients including a code identifier operatively communicating therewith, said code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of goods; and
- (b) at least one communication server being in communication with each of said plurality of user clients upon establishing communication therewith, said at least one communication server being configured so as to cumulatively grant any one consumer of the plurality of consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of said plurality of goods.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein said at least one communication server being further configured so as to allow any one consumer of the plurality of consumers to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, each of said plurality of optional benefits is trade for a predetermined value of bonus points.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein said code identifier is an optical scanner, whereas said code is an optical code.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein said optical scanner is a barcode reader, whereas said optical code is a barcode.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein said code identifier is a magnetic code reader, whereas said code is a magnetic code.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein said code identifier is a radiofrequency reader, whereas said code is a radiofrequency code.

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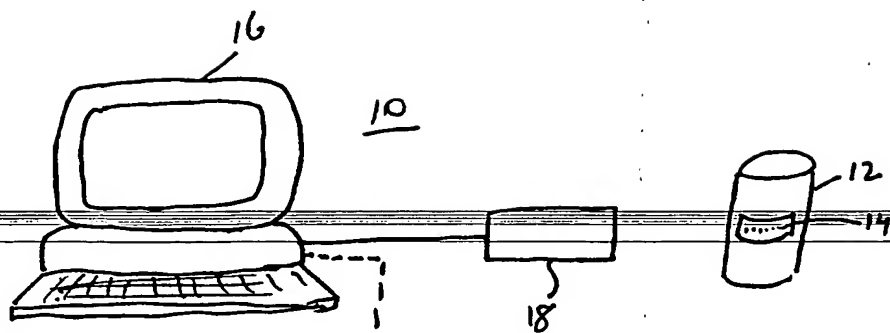


Fig. 1

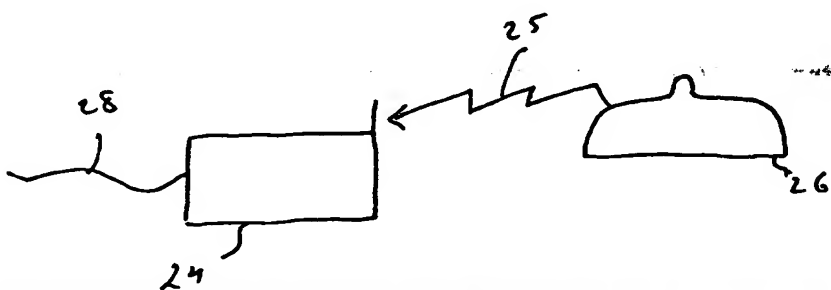


Fig. 2

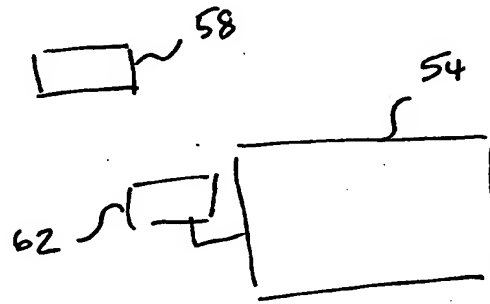
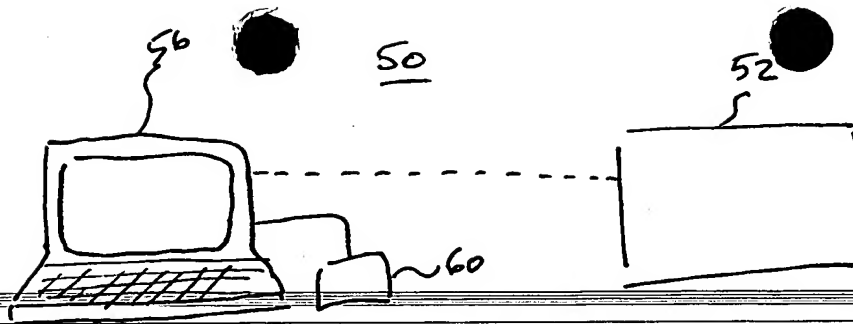


Fig 3

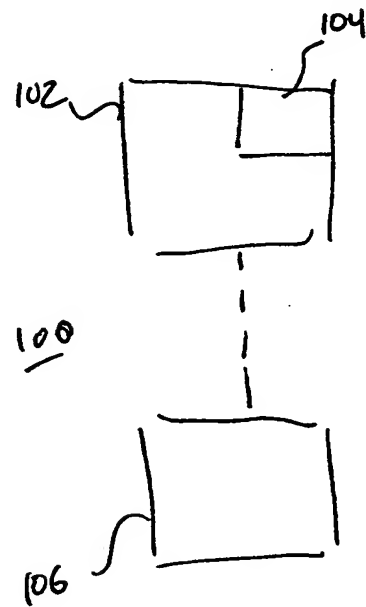
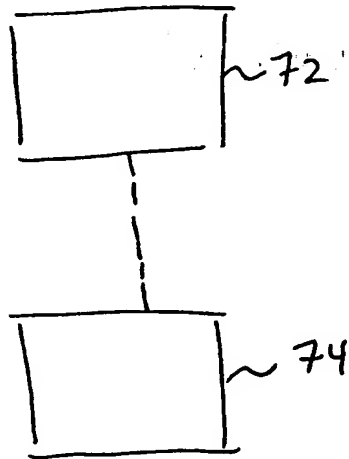


Fig 4

Fig 5

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